

THE STUDY OF MAN

THE PROPHETS OF THE NEW CONSERVATISM

What Curbs for Presumptuous Democratic Man?

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB

AT THE close of 1820, a year of rebellion in Spain, Portugal, and Naples, of political assassination in France and conspiratorial activity in England, Prince Metternich composed a "Confession of Faith" to be forwarded as a secret memorandum to Czar Alexander I. The lawlessness of the times, Metternich told the Czar, was the fault of that modern phenomenon, "the presumptuous man," the man who professed to be "the sole judge of his own actions."

Since 1820, the history of the world has been the history of presumption. Every country has experienced a social or political revolution, or even several revolutions, led by men who refused to accept the judgment of established authority. And each revolution has been preceded by a train of harbingers prophesying disaster, and followed by a train of mourners lamenting over the event. As a result, almost every generation since the fall of Metternich and the death of Alexander has been exposed

CONSERVATISM REVISITED, by the Pulitzer-prize poet Peter Viereck, is only one of a small tide of recent books in the same vein. Someone has recently remarked that there are probably more Americans writing books in defense of conservatism, than there are conservatives showing up at the polls; this is probably an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that conservative political thinking—if not conservative politics—has survived its seven lean years and is now waxing vigorous. Here, GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB subjects some of the representative books of the conservative revival to a critical appraisal. Miss Himmelfarb edited Lord Acton's *Essays on Freedom and Power* published last year. She has studied at Brooklyn College, the University of Chicago, and Cambridge University.

to what the historian is pleased to call a "conservative reaction." The conservative prefers to think of himself as a saving remnant come to rescue the world from the democratic hordes that are the modern equivalent of the barbarian invaders, from the presumptuous men who will not stay down. At his every appearance in history, the conservative discerns the unique, unprecedented symptoms of a civilization torn by anarchy, liable to momentary disintegration, a peril to the individual soul and the national spirit. In every age there is anxious talk of the "crisis of our time."

The crisis of one time generally proves to be the crisis of all time, and the murmurings of conservatives merge in a soothing hum of lamentations and exhortations in which the words tradition, law and order, aristocracy, and hierarchy can occasionally be distinguished. Some few voices are striking enough to command attention; such are the voices of Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and Henry Adams. Their sermons are unique not because of the special cogency of their arguments or the infallibility of their knowledge, but because of the fineness of their perceptions, the precision of their analysis, the pathos of genuine involvement.

To conservative voices such as these, even the presumptuous reader can respond warmly and wholly. The conviction of truth is given immediately; it need not be teased out of them, worried over. It is only when the reader approaches thinkers of a lesser order, the minor prophets of conservatism, that he starts to carp, examines the logic of their arguments, exposes their assumptions, quarrels with their metaphors, questions their consistency. He leaves behind reflective appreciation to engage in political debate.

AT FIRST glance, Peter Viereck's recently published *Conservatism Revisited* (Scribner's, 187 pp. \$2.50) gives promise of belonging to one of the more rigorous varieties of conservative thinking. To go to Metternich for a lesson in conservatism is a bold stroke. To a certain extent the way had been prepared by the provocative work of Guglielmo Ferrero, but it remained for Viereck to rediscover Metternich as a political mentor and philosopher for contemporary America. That his is an unpopular position, Viereck has no doubt. And he pronounces himself reconciled to the scorn of popular opinion. It comes as a surprise, therefore, to discover how little he earns it.

The liberal whom Viereck undertakes to engage in combat is possessed of an optimistic and secular, often hedonistic, religion of progress; a faith in the masses, in the natural goodness of man, and in modern technics; a taste for equality rather than freedom, change rather than tradition, and relative rather than absolute standards. The conservative presumably represents the contradictory of these propositions, although Viereck does not catalogue them in such bald form. But Viereck is no hot-headed agitator of conservatism. In a period of Communist totalitarian expansion, he looks upon liberalism as distinctly a lesser evil and a potential ally. By "mediation, reconciliation, and tolerant compromise," he hopes that liberal conservatism and conservative liberalism, coming from opposite directions, can be brought together at the point which Goethe once designated as genuine liberalism: a reliance upon gradual reform and a patient toleration of "inevitable wrongs."

From this definition of a liberalism that is also conservative to Metternich's species of conservatism would seem a long way, if Viereck did not take a short-cut. Metternich ceases to be the politician who sought to impose by force the institutions of a legitimacy that had collapsed when confronted with the French Revolution and had been incapable of offering either moral or physical resistance to Napoleon. Instead he becomes the champion of law against force. The motto on his coat of arms, "*Kraft im Recht*," Viereck takes to mean "Strength in Law," or, at worst, "Force within Law"; in either case he sees it as a significant antithesis to Bismarck's "Blood and Iron." Perhaps unwittingly, Viereck makes of Metternich a curiously pathetic figure. Tied to the conference table at a time when his opponents were march-

ing to the battlefield, shackled by ethical scruples while others basely exploited the possibilities of *Realpolitik*, Metternich becomes a kindly, imposed-upon underdog. It seems almost uncharitable for the critic to observe that Metternich's famous conferences were intended only as the prelude to bigger and better battles (as Naples, Piedmont, and Spain had the misfortune of discovering). And it hardly seems necessary to point out that Metternich, the master diplomat, would no more have inscribed the actual principles of a repressive authoritarianism on his coat of arms than Bismarck would have inscribed "Blood and Iron" on his.

IN WANTING to give Metternich credit for too much, Viereck succeeds only in detracting from the credit genuinely due him as an inspired diplomat, a ruthless politician, and a thinker rarely confused by the stratagems of his own diplomacy and politics. Nor does Viereck do justice to Metternich's opponents when he implies that the alternative to Metternich's leadership was that of the nationalist, racist, proto-Nazi Friedrich Jahn, or that the alternative to Metternich's policy of legitimacy was a system of "mass politics." Jahn was an aberration of the times, and mass politics was rarely an ideal, let alone a genuine political possibility. Metternich's real opponents were liberals, even conservative liberals, who could not tolerate a system that put a premium on corrupt, tyrannical, and at bottom anarchic government. It was against these liberals that Metternich methodically and self-consciously proceeded. And it is here that Viereck loses heart. He does no more to rehabilitate conservatism as Metternich understood it than to rehabilitate Metternich as he must have understood himself.

If there is any one point, any single empirical test, by which conservatism can be distinguished from liberalism, it is a respect for aristocracy and aristocratic institutions. Every tenet of liberalism repudiates the idea of a fixed aristocratic class; every tenet of conservatism affirms it. It is decreed by tradition, implied in the concept of a social hierarchy, required by the principles of "law and order." If conservatives deride democracy as a system of mass politics, it is because they have a vision of another political system, that of 18th or early 19th century England perhaps, when there was a genuine governing aristocracy. Unfortunately the England of that robust time is a fading memory to all but the most tenacious conserv-

atives. Viereck, not among the most tenacious, frankly withdraws the concept of aristocracy as a class, but then hastens to introduce the idea of an aristocratic "spirit." The class may have become "anachronistic and functionless," but the spirit is vital. And the aristocratic spirit—"dutiful public service, insistence on quality and standards, the decorum and ethical inner check of *noblesse oblige*"—is, conveniently enough, "open to all, regardless of class." The nobleman need no longer acquire political office by hereditary right; appointments can be made democratically from all classes. Indeed, "in an effective democracy, this spirit permeates the whole community."

AS WITH aristocracy, so with most of the other major categories of political thought. Conservatism's strongest talking point in the past few decades has been the growth of the absolute state, a development to which liberals have inadvertently contributed in their zeal for democratic equality and economic security. Viereck does, to be sure, pay the customary respects to the "leveling equality" and "majority despotism" of modern democracy, to the "century of the common man" that can produce only the "commonest man." But he will not be churlish, like some of his more quarrelsome conservative colleagues. Democracy, too, has its good points. In fact, it was the conservative Disraeli, Viereck reminds us, who was responsible for the extension of the franchise to the English working class, and it is this broad-mindedness of Disraeli that Viereck recommends to modern conservatives. A democracy, in fact, can be the "best government on earth," if only it will try to elevate all of its citizens into aristocrats instead of degrading them into an indistinguishable mass.

Nor need conservatives, Viereck assures us, shy from the ideal of economic security. Security, he grants, does tend to put material needs over spiritual ones, to regiment the individual, and to endanger liberty. But conservatives cannot deny the legitimate demands of security and social justice. Social reform, welfare legislation, is the ethical duty of every government, and conservatives should be quick to commend it. They need only keep in mind that while welfare laws are good, the "welfare superstate" is not. There is a fine, imaginary line beyond which the desire for security entails a loss of liberty. Upon that line Viereck beseeches us to fix our attention.

Our attention, unfortunately, is apt to wander. We had supposed that it is the liberal who fancies that self-imposed, imaginary boundaries can confine men; the function of the stronger-minded conservative, traditionally, has been to explode this optimistic illusion. But Viereck is not the traditional conservative. Everything, it seems, is reconcilable with everything else in his benevolent universe, until his conservatism becomes a grab-bag of all good intentions, all worthy ideals, all honorific labels. Where the older, more rigorous conservatives emphasized the recalcitrance of ideas and institutions, the fixed limits of political action, and the antinomy of principles, Viereck thinks of ideas as eternally pliable, of action as open to infinite possibilities, and of principles as all ultimately congenial.

ONE stamp of the conservative, however, is ineradicable—the distrust of the completely free person, the man beholden to no one but himself, Metternich's presumptuous man. Against this danger the conservative has at his disposal a battery of powerful weapons in the form of social authorities, institutions, laws, and conventions. There cannot be too many of these deterrents. They may be physical or moral, real or fancied; the conservative does not care so long as they have the desired effect. Thus Viereck invokes religion to stabilize society and prevent an amoral statism. But religion must not be carried away by its own enthusiasm, he cautions. Its dogmas had best not be taken literally, for obscurantism can be as dangerous and fanatical as free-thinking. What is required is a humanist respect for all religious sentiments, regardless of denomination. "When the historian concludes that religion, with its brotherhood and its ethical sanctions, best sustains a free society, he is supporting religion as a humanist in the Erasmus tradition, not as a theologian." Utility, rather than any sectarian idea of the truth, becomes his ultimate religious principle. In each religion Viereck discovers the virtue that society can capitalize on: "the stern moral commandments and social justice of Judaism; the love for beauty and for untrammelled intellectual speculation of the free Hellenic mind; the Roman Empire's universalism and its exaltation of law; and the Aristotelianism, Thomism, and anti-nominalism included in the Middle Ages." There is no God and the humanist is his prophet.

Against the vulgar materialist preaching the

doctrine of the full stomach, Viereck comes to propound a conservatism based upon the non-material "moral absolutes of the spirit." It is the paradox of life, he says, that these moral absolutes, which are "non-existent," should be the foundation of existence. A more striking paradox, the reader may find, is the fact that these non-existent moral absolutes are identified in Viereck's mind with the undeniably existent and neither moral nor absolute precepts of positive law—with "established traditional legality" rather than an abstract moral law. If Viereck can be said to take a stand anywhere, it is here, with established law and tradition. He admits that law and tradition, the haphazard accumulation of centuries, combine good and evil in inextricable confusion. Yet he holds it to be the duty of the conservative to sanction the presence of evil rather than endanger the structure of society. "You weaken the aura of all good laws every time you break a bad one," he warns. With the greatest of ease Viereck makes the descent from the exalted heights of moral and spiritual absolutes to the lowlands of Poor Richard's wisdom.

AFTER Viereck, it is comforting to turn to an author who promises to pursue a single line of thought. Where Viereck's book is a "timely" excursion, Bertrand de Jouvenel's work, *On Power* (Viking, 421 pp. \$5.00), gives the appearance of being a scholarly tome laboriously worrying history for a systematic exposition of the nature of social and political power. The exposition is not as systematic as the chapter titles suggest, and the historical and anthropological evidence is both more conventional and more questionable than the professional scholar would like, but there is a consistency of tone and a logical ordering of ideas for which the reader may be grateful.

For Jouvenel the idea of power is the one constant in political society. Power is authority—not an impersonal, anonymous authority emanating from a nation, not an "it" operating without intention or passion, but a "they," a body of men governing other men and themselves governed by their passions, the greatest passion being the will to power. Power, in capital letters, is an abstraction representing the governmental authority in the state. As the fact of power may be predicated of every society, so the tendency to expansion may be predicated of every power. Power may be monarchical or democratic, egoistical or altruistic, but whatever

its shape it will seek to usurp a greater and greater place in society. Jouvenel makes no bones about it; power is a necessary feature of society, a necessary evil, and the more it is permitted to expand, the more evil it is.

Viereck may be more ready to label himself as a conservative, but Jouvenel is the more authentic specimen. The connection between Jouvenel's analysis of power and his predilection for conservatism is plain. Power (the state) expands at the expense of the rest of society; it is engaged in a constant tug of war with the social forces that are relatively autonomous. In a monarchical or aristocratic state, power is confined to a small group. A democracy, by making the mass of people participants in power, makes power almost synonymous with society. The people's desire to limit power is replaced by the desire to share in it, and, having shared in it, to increase it. There is no tyranny like the tyranny of the masses, for from the masses there is no refuge, no escape.

THE idea of an aristocracy holds no fear and no embarrassment for Jouvenel. With the aplomb of the natural aristocrat, he finds in the class society of antiquity the true condition of liberty. The "freeman" of antiquity was not, as we are inclined to assume today, everyman. He was a man of a certain class who was habituated to act in a certain way and could be counted on to act in that way. Liberty was a privilege a man merited and enjoyed, not a right which anyone might claim. Jouvenel does not shy from the disagreeable conclusion that for some men to be free, others had to be slaves, that the role of citizen and gentleman required the leisure made possible only by a slave society. That there is no aristocracy today is equally the fault of the patrician and the plebeian, he admits. But he is not deluded by the vision of an "aristocratic spirit" descending upon the masses. With the passing of the aristocracy, the aristocratic spirit, which is nothing less than the spirit of liberty, has become more and more difficult to evoke.

In good conservative fashion, Jouvenel is an unregenerate pessimist. Power expands, crushing liberty and individuality beneath it. Every revolution ostensibly fought for liberty inaugurates a regime more absolutist than its predecessor, for it takes over the old instruments of power and creates new ones. The world becomes more and more democratic, and democ-

racy becomes more and more oppressive. Disraeli—despite Viereck—was playing the game of Caesarism when he extended the franchise to masses of men who had a stake not in liberty but only in power. And Caesarism became more irresistible as it was discovered that security is a more primary need than liberty and that between security and liberty there is no mediation. Where Viereck's mind roams freely, fashioning the world to its fancy, Jouvenel's is confined within the boundaries of a depressingly deterministic universe.

This universe, however, is not entirely without possibilities of reform. Power, Jouvenel holds, can either be checked by the conflict of opposing social forces, or limited by the operation of law. In a democracy the first is illusory because no minority can withstand a majority on any issue the majority considers to be crucial. We are left, then, with law. But not any kind of law can save a society as far gone as ours on the road to absolutism. Men today do not pretend to respect a law that is law only by virtue of ancestral sanctions and taboos. Moreover this law has been so long at the mercy of interests, opinions, and passions that it has itself become the instrument of power. What is required is a measure outside of man, an objective standard by which man and man-made law can be judged. Even constitutional law and judicial review only serve to approximate that measure and may, in fact, fall far short of it, for the constitution itself is tainted by political opportunism. The ultimate, immutable measure—the “eternal verities”—is to be found only in natural law as expounded, for example, by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Here power can discover its proper function and its true limits—its duty to enforce respect for the true law and in turn to be bound by it.

IN DIGNITY of conception and soundness of logic, Jouvenel is unimpeachable, so that one feels almost obliged to apologize for caviling about truth and relevancy. His gloomy prognostication of the fate of society and his desperate proposals for remedy—for natural law is, to the modern sceptic, a desperate proposal—hinge upon his conception of power as an ever-expanding force intent upon destroying or revolutionizing society. But the fact is that power is as often conservative as it is revolutionary. If it is false to suppose, with the Marxist, that the state is the docile instrument of the ruling class in society—that the contempo-

rary state, for example, is merely the tool of capitalism—it is equally extravagant to suppose, with Jouvenel, that the state is always bent upon undermining the dominant social class—that “whether it is socialist or whether it is not, Power [the state] must always be at war with the capitalist authorities and despoil the capitalists of their accumulated wealth.” This is standing the Marxist theory on its head with a vengeance. Even before Marx himself had composed his most important work, Tocqueville set the style for Jouvenel's acrobatics when he described, in a brilliant feat of historical imagination and insight, the alliance of the pre-revolutionary French monarchy and the middle class against the socially dominant aristocracy. With the image of France and the teaching of Tocqueville before him, Jouvenel sees all of history as a war of the state against the ruling class. An English historian, on the other hand, remembering his own 18th century, when the aristocracy was both the ruling power in the state and the dominant social class, would be inclined to think of power as the agent of society rather than as its enemy.

Contemporary history doles out its evidence impartially to support either Tocqueville or Marx. In the Nazi state, power was aggressive, building up its own authority at the expense of social authorities, pursuing its own ends in defiance of society's. In England it has been conservative: that the Conservative party should be solicitous of established interests is taken for granted, but even the socialists have been reluctant to claim the full measure of control that they might.

Power itself, it appears, can be modest. The institutions through which it rules exert a restraining influence upon it. If the passions of men have been known to alter institutions, the disposition of institutions as often as not succeeds in altering men. The implications of this reading of history are obvious. If power is not necessarily the ruthless vampire Jouvenel believes it to be, democracy may not be as fearsome as he supposes. The will of the majority, to assume for the moment that power can reside in a majority, is less than omnipotent. History, conventions, institutions, exert a backward drag upon it. The conservative, playing his hand shrewdly, can even count on finding an ally in the bureaucracy of the democratic state.

Jouvenel has none of Viereck's equivocations as to the ultimate measure of men's actions. His equivocations appear in lesser, temporal

matters, so that he can write of the "Stuart or Bourbon or Romanov 'tyranny'" as if these were not truly tyrannies, and can discuss tolerantly "the good-natured Louis XVI," "the weakling Nicholas II," and the unambitious Charles I, who "was no danger to anyone." If natural law has any concrete meaning, if it pretends to a concern about the sacredness of the individual personality, then these tyrannies were as odious as any in history. Jouvenel would reply that the revolutions which overthrew these tyrannies produced regimes which were even more oppressive. But if it is the duty of the historian to caution us against the hazard—or fatality, as Jouvenel seems to believe—of the degeneration of revolutions, it remains the duty of the moralist to encourage, not stifle, the impulse to justice.

This is both the merit and the failing of a conservatism like Jouvenel's. Nothing short of an absolute moral code can expose the presumptuousness of man. But nothing is more certain to fortify a man in his presumptions than an absolute moral code. Like power, morality is both conservative and revolutionary. It teaches men to distinguish between heaven and earth, and it inspires them to create a heaven on earth. It makes them impatient with a power that is evil, but because they are only human they must oppose power with power, evil with incipient evil. Conservatism can be legitimized only by appealing to an absolute morality. But its practical effectiveness, unfortunately, depends upon an attachment to a particular code of positive law. Viereck was right, after all, when he pointed out that "you weaken the aura of all good laws every time you break a bad one." It is also true that you weaken the aura of all laws, good or bad, merely by subjecting them to comparison with an eternal, natural law.

The only kind of conservatism that is safe from revolution—safe, at least, in theory—is one which frankly rests its case on an actual historical situation which it judges to be good. It must seek to maintain or restore that situation in its entirety, abandon all pretence of choosing between good and bad, and look for no higher justification than that what is, or was, is right—or if justification is necessary, be content with the modest assertion that what will be will be worse. In view of the fact, however, that this is likely to be unsatisfactory to all but the already confirmed conservative and that as a missionary gospel it is almost certain to fail,

Jouvenel may be wise in holding out for dignity and sublimity even at the expense of practicality.

THE most disagreeable critic could not accuse American conservatism, at least in its most popular form, of want of practicality. Natural law, even tradition, are beyond its ken. With the decline of the Southern and New England "aristocracies," conservatism had transferred its loyalties to the less elegant, more substantial class of citizens for whom the practical principles of laissez-faire constitute the eternal truth of economics and a sufficient philosophy of life. For a more thoughtful, sophisticated conservatism, one must go to James Burnham, who can draw upon a European tradition, although a European tradition very different from that of either Jouvenel or Viereck. Yet even Burnham never permits himself to forget that the first injunction is practicality. In David Spitz's recent *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought* (Macmillan, 304 pp. \$4.50), the work of Burnham is the first and by far the most important subject treated. And Burnham will take no nonsense from the impractical theoreticians of ethics, religion, or metaphysics. Only facts, he holds, scientific, demonstrable, practical facts, are worthy of the serious political thinker.

The principal fact to emerge from Burnham's two volumes, *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) and *The Machiavellians* (1943), is the one which had so impressed Jouvenel—the fact of power. Politics is a struggle for power, in which power is a means to other ends but also, and more importantly, an end in itself. Where Jouvenel is a frankly hostile judge, Burnham claims to be a neutral observer and a scientific analyst. To Burnham it is as futile to think of deploring or condemning power as to deplore or condemn the movement of the tides. Power is a fact of political life, and before facts the scientist must be submissive.

Jouvenel, hating power, watched it become more powerful as it became more democratic; his treatise on power, therefore, is an attack upon democracy. Burnham, dispassionately observing power, noticed that it remained in the hands of a minority in spite of public professions of democracy; his treatise on power, therefore, is a denial of democracy. In a synthesis of the work of Robert Michels (*Political Parties*, 416 pp. \$4.50, reprinted this year by the Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois), Gaetano

Mosca (*The Ruling Class*), and Vilfredo Pareto (*Mind and Society*), and of his own analysis of contemporary America, Burnham presents a theory of society which is intended to embrace all political systems. Whatever the superficial form of government, the reality is the concentration of power in the hands of a small ruling class. Since the ruling class today is not the mass of enfranchised citizens but the relatively few men who rule in its name, democratic despotism in its literal sense, a tyranny of the masses, is as fanciful as democratic rule. Under the guise of democracy, however—and here Burnham temporarily makes common cause with Jouvenel—totalitarianism may flourish. This happens when the state, ostensibly representing the people, is permitted to arrogate to itself one social function after another, thus making obsolete all the autonomous forces in society. The idea of democracy is an illusion, but the illusion is dangerous, more dangerous, indeed, than the fact could be. The tyranny of the majority would be bad enough, the implication is, but a tyranny exercised by a minority in the name of the majority and with the passive consent of the majority is even worse.

Jouvenel refuses to compromise with the egoistic instincts that go into the drive for power; against power he can only invoke the spiritual force of natural law. Burnham, himself a Machiavellian in the tradition of all good politicians, insists that power must check power, materialism must counter materialism, and egoism must vie with egoism. Everything else he consigns to the trash-heap of ideology as the verbal trappings designed to conceal the true ends of power. If selfish interests want to concentrate power in their own hands, other selfish interests, by putting in their own selfish bids for power, help keep liberty alive. Liberty depends upon the virility of the autonomous, traditional forces in society—religious, economic, political, military. What democracy looks down upon as “pressure groups,” liberty looks up to for its security. “Juridical defense”—the formal structure of laws and constitutions—is effective in checking power only when behind it is an array of forces contending for power.

JOUVENEL's law is a moral one, a prescription of the way men should act; Burnham claims that his is a scientific one, a description of the way men do act. It is proper, then, that the “iron law of oligarchy”—the term is Michels’—by which democracy is converted into oligarchy,

should give rise not to a morally superior class, such as Jouvenel's aristocracy, but to a class superior only in having the good fortune to occupy a particularly strategic position in society. The ruling class, according to the Machiavellians, rules for no more exalted reason than that it happens to fulfill the “organizational imperatives” of society. The difference between the political characters of Jouvenel and of Burnham may be measured by the difference between Burnham's “managerial” class and Jouvenel's aristocracy of cultured gentlemen.

Burnham restored to conservatism some of the hard-headedness it had lost in an effete age of liberal democracy. But his hard-headedness itself nurtures illusion. By eliminating from the universe of political reality anything that smacks of morals, of non-material and non-individual interests, he has depleted reality of much that gives it texture and depth. When he reduces Dante's *De Monarchia*, for example, to a party tract of the Ghibellines—the opponents of the papacy—by ruthlessly cutting down “the myths, the ghosts, the idealistic abstractions” of God, eternal salvation, universal empire, and universal peace, he exposes many interesting and inglorious details of the political struggles of the time, but he sacrifices other details that are of more than antiquarian or poetic interest. Sociologists will be quick to point out that even myths and ghosts can function in politics on their own terms, influencing the actions of leaders as well as of the more gullible masses.

It is a more serious objection, however—and here most sociologists beat a quick retreat—that the ideology may not be a myth or ghost at all, that it may, on rare occasions, enter politics not only as a psychological fact but as an objective truth about social reality. Almost no one today ventures to suggest that the democratic “ideology” of the general will and the general welfare is such a truth, that mankind is united by an authentic, common interest as well as divided by private interests.

Yet this is the crucial question separating liberal democracy and conservatism. Political philosophy, Burnham to the contrary notwithstanding, is an exercise in the legitimization of political institutions, laws, and traditions. The only means of legitimization available to the democrat—although he has recourse to it reluctantly, abashed by accusations of naivety on the one hand and demagoguery on the other—is to assert the validity of the principles of general

will and general welfare. Conservatives, however they may quarrel among themselves, are agreed in denying the existence of this general will. Viereck may be only a half-hearted champion of Metternich's theory that institutions, laws, and traditions are legitimized by history, but he is an enthusiastic opponent of the democratic theory of the general will. The only form of legitimacy recognized by Jouvenel is natural law, while Burnham finds legitimacy—although he prefers a more neutral word—in the conflict of interests and powers. For all of them the general will is a myth devised by ingenious politicians to perpetuate their own power or by an intolerant majority to suppress inconvenient minorities.

BURNHAM has been most successful in bringing into disrepute the idea of the general will. It is typical of the lack of conviction or imagination among most democratic apologists that David Spitz, in his confutation of Burnham, should fail to emphasize this problem, choosing, instead, to elaborate upon a host of formal, logical, and methodological objections. Instead of pressing Burnham for a more rigorous definition of the ruling class or of the relation between politics and economics, he might, with greater profit, have taken the initiative by boldly affirming the meaningfulness of the general will. Just as surely as men are motivated by personal and class interests, so they are inspired by social interests, by some notion of a general interest which is not merely the sum of all private interests but which transcends all private interests. It takes a particularly strong-minded naturalist and empiricist to ignore the most palpable and natural social fact, the fact that society, like the individual, has a real spiritual and psychological existence with its own needs and problems. Spitz need not have been offended by Burnham's assumption that economic and class interests play such a large part in politics. There is nothing remarkable about this, nothing remarkable about the corruption of men or ideals. What is remarkable is that economic interests can never manage to subvert ideals completely, that a genuine conception of the general welfare should persist in the face of such great odds.

There is a famous quip that there is more in common between two deputies one of whom is a revolutionary, than between two revolutionaries one of whom is a deputy. Why this should be triumphantly cited by conservatives as a

criticism of democracy is difficult to see, for it is just this commonplace of political experience that is encouraging to liberal democracy. Deputies are much of a kind, not only in sharing a common predilection for graft, but in sharing a common fund of ideals and attitudes before which their class commitments have to give way. If there is matter here for despair, there is also matter for hope.

THAT there is a truth beyond ideologies and even a truth beyond power, interests, and passions has been one of the most interesting motifs in the work of Leo Strauss. His most recent book, *On Tyranny* (Political Science Classics, 121 pp. \$2.25), a brilliant exposition of Xenophon's "Hiero," gives the theme an intriguing twist by introducing the concept of "misology." In its dictionary definition, misology is a hatred of reason and reasoning. As a political conception it implies a distrust of free, democratic inquiry; by extension it implies the existence of an esoteric truth which it would be dangerous or unwise to circulate in society. A truth, an objective truth about the nature of social reality, may become, when it escapes from the sanctum of philosophy, a political "falsehood." The philosopher might know it to be the truth, for example, that social institutions have their origin in a struggle for power, in force rather than justice, but he is morally and politically obliged to act as if they had their origin in justice rather than force. The truths of philosophy, the misologist would say, are not necessarily the truths of politics and morality.

It would be too lengthy a digression to describe the subtle maneuvers by which Strauss succeeds in making Xenophon mean exactly the opposite of what he said, and so clears him of the suspicion of misology. The simple idea of misology, however, divorced from its context in the "Hiero," can help clarify the character of conservative thought. What is the idea of the presumptuous man that so exercises conservatives but the fear that the free use of man's reason, his intelligence, will undermine society?

Not all conservatives, to be sure, are conscious of the fear in the same way. Edmund Burke was one of the few to see it clearly and admit it frankly. Prejudices were far better than reason, he argued, as he inveighed against the men of the Enlightenment who imagined that they could spin a new world out of the matter of their minds. Contemporary conserva-

tives have not Burke's boldness or candidness, but in one way or another they attest to conservatism's distrust of intelligence and free inquiry. Viereck, paying lip service to the humanist reverence for reason, casts about for ways to confine reason, and he comes up with a religion that is not for religion's sake but for society's, and a law that is society's and no other's. Jouvenel more astutely tries to limit man's reason by establishing the superiority of a divine law. Burnham takes the desire for the deed: the masses cannot act rationally in politics; it is the privilege of the elite to do so, and it is the elite which contrives the myths that hold the masses in bondage and society in order.

The conservative suspects that the truth, which gives life and dignity—and power—to an aristocracy or elite, might bring catastrophe if allowed to permeate the lower layers of society.

Only the presumptuous man, the democrat, would dare to bring the truth into the market place—a "Phantastick Vision," as Diogenes is made to say in a dialogue conceived by Lytton Strachey:

"Locke: If men were told the Truth, might they not believe it? Let Rulers be bold and honest and it is possible that the folly of their Peoples will disappear.

"Diogenes: A pretty, Phantastick Vision. But History is against you.

"Moses: And Prophecy.

"Diogenes: And Common Observation. Look at the world at this moment and what do we see? So long as it endures the world will continue to be ruled by cajolery, by injustice, and by imposture.

"Locke: If that be so, I must take leave to lament the Destiny of the Human Race."